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New York bureau of legal first aid

[Circular]

[New York?]

[1917?]

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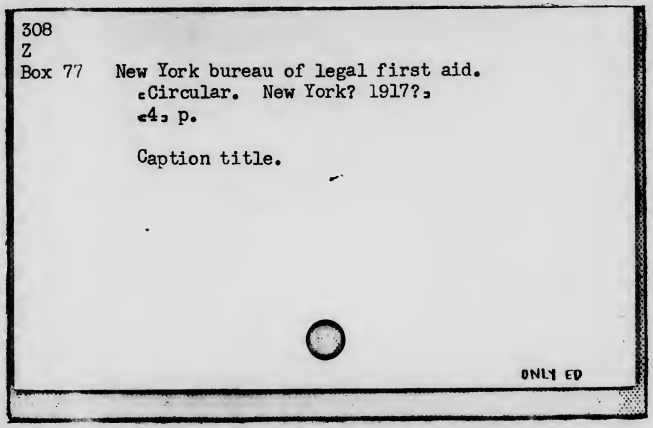

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NEW YORK BUREAU OF LEGAL FIRST AID

70 Fifth Avenue

The organization which does for New York what the National Civil Liberties Bureau does for the country at large, and to which the latter refers its local applicants.

THE SECOND DRAFT

"Who will take care of my wife and little children if they take me away?"

"My wife is going to have a child, but they say that does not matter because I married since May 18th. I can prove I have known her four years. Must I go and leave her alone?"

"I like America. I'd like to be a citizen here, but I have two brothers fighting for Austria. Please get me an exemption. You see I cannot kill my own brothers."

These are the things that are said many times each day in the Bureau of Legal First Aid. Similar things are also said over and over at the exemption boards by weeping mothers and grey-haired old women, looking ahead to the dreary institutions to be their homes after their bread-winners have gone to camp. Perhaps the lawyers who since the Second Draft, December 15th, have listened patiently so many hours a day at the boards, have felt it their duty to think constantly of the National Army and to steel their hearts against the human tragedies spread out before them. Perhaps—and indeed we have often found this to be the case—they have been too busy to acquaint themselves properly with the regulations devised for the draft, exceedingly complicated and subject to the frequent revisions of Washington. Certain it is that the assistance received at the boards has been, in the majority of cases, routine and perfunctory.

Thus many drafted men of all nationalities, Russians, Hungarians, Italians, Finns and here and there an Armenian or a Turk, all indeed who speak and understand little English and are too poor to pay counsel, have turned from the boards with a keen sense of injustice and again and again sought our assistance.

4,000 assisted

The aid given in our office differs in two particulars. First, we seek to advise drafted men *in advance* how rights may be safeguarded. Second, remembering we are dealing with untrained minds, we exert all our resourcefulness to assemble proof of claims in a manner no less accurate than convincing. Advice and individual aid have been given to upwards of 4,000 people in connection with claims for which a far-seeing Government has itself made provision.

Red Cross

Organized for legal aid solely, no attempt can be made to relieve the many cases of extreme poverty which come to our attention in the families of drafted men. But during the period necessary to secure the discharge from camp of husband and father, from time to time we bring individuals into relation with the Civilian Branch of the Red Cross.

COURT-WORK

But there is another and more important function of the Bureau. From the outbreak of the war to the present time, all over our country, Government agents and District Attorneys approved by over-zealous patriots, have caused the arrest and conviction of many honest and fearless persons who were but exercising the American right of free criticism.

Cases handled

And though of late we have suffered less from this official terrorism, *so long as the war continues* and longer, unless democracy in this country is quick to recover lost ground, organized legal aid for officialdom's victims will be a necessity in every community. For this locality the Bureau has stood a rallying place for the protection of civil liberties. Our counsel and co-operating attorneys have appeared in the courts in some forty-five cases, the charges ranging all the way from "disorderly conduct" (war-time vernacular for free speech) to "treason." Under the latter charge the Bureau is now defending a well-known American citizen of Russian birth and writer on Russian affairs. Some weeks ago this

FOR ONE MONTH

$500.00 will pay the Bureau's staff;
$250.00 will start a much needed fund for court expenses;
$100.00 will print our leaflets, supply the office, stamp our letters;
$35.00 will keep the roof over our heads.

OR

Would you not like to pay for **everything we do during one day?**
$25.00 will do it.
$10.00, $5.00, every single dollar will help.

I hereby { contribute / pledge } the sum of .....

to be paid { monthly / weekly } to the work of the N. Y. Bureau of Legal First Aid, 70 Fifth Avenue.

Name .....

Address .....

849

OVER

client addressed an audience of Russian mechanics in convention on "The Aims of the Russian Revolution and our Convention." Unfortunately, the District Attorney, a poor Russian scholar, translated the subject of the lecture as "The Aims of the Russian Revolution and Here," and our client, thought to be a dangerous man, was held for seventeen days without bail!

Legal questions

Again the Bureau, through its counsel, has sought to establish the constitutionality of America's draft of subjects of those countries whose treaty rights would seem to render their citizens immune from military service. After much delay on the part of the courts, writs have at last been signed in the cases of Russian declarants, and to establish the law on this point the Bureau will carry the cases to the highest court of the land.

Liberal rulings

We are glad to note that Secretary Baker under order of January 18th has ruled that while careful scrutiny is to be given to marriages entered into after May 18th, exemption is to be granted where the dependency claim has merit. Liberal rulings of this sort, together with broad interpretations of the law, the Bureau is constantly urging upon the Department in Washington and its local representatives.

CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS

Up to this time, we have not been called to do court-martial work. In connection with the Conscientious Objector problem, the Bureau is vitally concerned to see that all young men who feel it their duty to run counter to public opinion for conscience sake receive the same consideration and treatment, regardless of the particular time at which they may take their stand. It has always urged that these young men shall not be classed with those who evade the law from ignoble motives. While it does not counsel those in camp, it keeps in close touch with Conscientious Objectors in the cantonments about New York, to the end that it may promptly report any violations on the part of the military authorities of the provisions made by the War Department on their behalf.

HELP US TODAY!

ALL THIS,—OUR PROTECTION OF THOSE DRAFTED, OUR DEFENSE IN THE COURTS OF MALIGNED MEN AND WOMEN, OUR WHOLE FIGHT FOR DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS—MUST CEASE UNLESS THIS APPEAL MEETS A PROMPT AND VIGOROUS RESPONSE.

Make checks payable to New York Bureau of Legal First Aid

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